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Matife

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The Arts Council of Great Britain

An exhibition of the sculpture of

Matife

and 3 paintings with studies

The Tate Gallery, Millbank

9 January - 22 February 1953

Foreword

The number of paintings by Matisse on view in the public art galleries of Great Britain is fragmentary compared with the great collections in Paris, Copenhagen, Merion (Barnes Foundation), Baltimore, and Moscow (now closed); and there has only been in this country one retrospective exhibition of this great artist's work on a scale which does honour to his position in contemporary art – the two-man show, shared with his old friend and rival Picasso, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1945. None the less one may say that Matisse is well known here as one of the great painters of the present century. He has lately been the subject of a documentary film and of a great critical study by Mr Alfred Barr, an essential work of reference to which acknowledgement is gratefully made. The daily Press paid their tribute when eighteen months ago at the age of 81 he completed what may well come to be regarded as the summit of his achievement, the monumental scheme of decoration of the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence. One is familiar too with his important work, as a graphic artist, an illustrator and a designer of textiles and glass. But as a sculptor he is virtually unknown, and not only in this country. This exhibition is therefore an event of special importance in that it contains virtually the whole of the artist's œuvre as a sculptor, thanks to generous loans made by M. Matisse himself, by the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, and by three private collectors. The only notable omission is the series of three versions of *The Back*, the first of which was, however, shown in London as long ago as 1912 and the second of which was included in the open-air International Exhibition of Sculpture arranged in 1948 at Battersea Park. So abundant and fertile is the genius of Matisse that he has often decided to work out a chosen theme in such series or, in the case of his paintings and drawings, in a wide range of variations which are not so much a procession of preliminary sketches as a *floraison* of effort which he feels necessary for the complete expression of the subject matter of the moment. It is of great interest therefore that the artist has sent for inclusion in this exhibition successive stages of three works of sculpture and variations and studies for six paintings and drawings.

The introduction to this catalogue comes from the scholarly and sympathetic pen of M. Jean Cassou, Directeur du Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris. M. Georges Salles, Directeur des Musées de France, has once again given his friendly support, and M. Philippe Erlanger, Directeur de l'Association Française d'Action Artistique, under whose auspices this exhibition is being shown in London, has co-operated with valuable assistance. Mr Frank McEwen, Fine Arts Officer of the British Council in Paris, has provided the essential liaison in the negotiations and other practical arrangements for the exhibition. We must also thank the Trustees and Director of the Tate Gallery for their readiness to welcome the exhibition at a moment when other important demands are being made on their resources.

Philip James

Introduction by Jean Cassou

One of the reproaches which will assuredly be made against our age is that it failed to provide its great artists with more frequent opportunities of taking part in great monumental schemes or in projects towards which all the arts could contribute. In particular we have not offered to our great painters the possibility of exercising the diversity of their gifts; for they have this diversity of talent. The great painters of our time resemble the great artists of the Renaissance; like them they have encyclopaedic powers and they do not regard one art as greater than another but, are eager to practise them all. If they have confined themselves to easel painting it is for want of walls to cover; walls which they have so seldom been given. Many techniques have attracted them: ceramics, tapestry, sculpture.

Matisse is certainly one of these widely endowed artists who would have wanted to express himself in his entirety. Any excursions he has made into the companion arts bear witness to this. He is a technician—a multiple technician—a craftsman, an artifact, who knows how to approach decoration on the monumental scale. As a craftsman he has a respect for technical ability, which has always made him ready to collaborate on any great undertaking. He shows both structural conception and material mastery. He believes that there is not one privileged art but that in all the joy of creation is equally inherent. His hands itch to be at work and every kind of object is worthy of them. His constructive spirit is always ready to create, to direct, to order, to organize.

He is not only a painter. He is an artist in the Renaissance sense when to be an artist was also to be in every sense a man. He is also a sculptor and a great sculptor, as were Daumier, Gauguin, Renoir, and others among the greater of his contemporaries. In the domain of sculpture he shows himself truly as Matisse. His powerful personality shows itself clear and dominant as it does in the world of painting and in every other sphere in which he has left his mark; for, however forceful the originality of his genius may be, he knows too how to mould and accommodate it to the means employed, and it is in this very act of accommodation that his brilliance is apparent. In these sculptures, therefore, one can recognize the more familiar aspects of the genius of Matisse, but certain special aspects also emerge, more sharply than in his paintings. These were conditioned by the very nature of sculpture and the clarity of perception which it has encouraged in the artist.

The first piece of sculpture by Matisse, during his student years, in 1899, is a work inspired by the *Jaguar devouring a Hare* by Barye. In the previous year there had been the scandal of Rodin's *Balzac*. These two romantic sources in the domain of sculpture fed the budding genius of an artist, who in painting was to be a great classical artist. But one must not forget, in the growth of this artist, all kinds of strong impulses and energies arose and these found an outlet in modelling. It is also the influence of Rodin that one recognizes in the trembling figure of the *Slave* which dates from 1900 to 1903.

The style of Rodin seems in theory to be at the opposite pole to the forces which have conditioned the development of modern art. It remains none the less, by its wholehearted acceptance of the basic laws of sculpture, its prodigious organic vigour and its radiant and lyrical humanity, an ever-living source of inspiration. The influence of Rodin was a specially happy one for the genius of Matisse, then in youthful ebullience, who sought both to

feel and to understand – which he was to do with magistral assurance. At this moment, particularly, he was to feel, to invent, to take chances, and to turn in his tracks. It was in the sculptor's art, where the sensitive hand has a natural mastery over the intellect, that the impetuous and sensuous side of the creative temperament could best express itself. There is, therefore, one part of Matisse's temperament which finds itself at ease in following the tradition of Rodin. This part is Matisse the sculptor who, one must remember, was then about to become the leader of the Fauves.

The nudes sculptured by Matisse in this period are indeed very close to the nudes of Fauve painting. In particular the *Recumbent Nude* of 1907 which reappears in the painting, *Recumbent Nude, in memory of Biskra* from the museum at Baltimore. Matisse was then obsessed with a fierce desire to distort the model, one thigh doubled right over the other, an elbow lifted disproportionately over the head. He tended towards exaggeration and simplification. He was cruel in what we now call his expressionism. In painting this tendency not only expresses itself in the drawing, but also in the frenzy and arbitrariness of the pure colour which is the keynote of so many of his dazzling masterpieces. In sculpture this effect can only be obtained by particularly distorted gestures and the forceful arrangement of masses, but the spirit is the same, which is the spirit of the will carried to excess and consequently having something of the barbarous and primordial, so bizarre in appearance and exalting in effect.

The preoccupations of the sculptor are different from those of the painter. The latter expresses himself in two dimensions, the field in which Matisse as a painter was to triumph. The sculptor aims to express every plane in space. This aim is achieved in a work such as the *Two Negresses* of 1908. And after the surprisingly Florentine *Serpentine* Matisse the sculptor exploited all the possibilities of his art with his five versions of the head of *Jeannette*, too often overlooked and now brought to our attention in Mr Alfred Barr's comprehensive book on Matisse. We must realize that this was at the height of the inventive period of early cubism and it is interesting to follow the concurrent, if not parallel development, of two creative artists as dissimilar as Matisse and Picasso. Both, in entirely different ways, indulged in distortion of form at the same moment.

The Nice period of Matisse sees a new flowering of sculpture, notably the *Seated Nude* with both arms raised, a sister to the harmonious odalisques, but more restless in pose; this confirms that in his sculpture Matisse met difficulties which in his painting were either avoided or resolved. He turns again in two versions to the theme of the *Recumbent Nude* of 1907, but this time it is more relaxed. To sum up, one follows in Matisse's sculpture the curve of his genius. The same curve as of the genius he shows in his painting but always, it seems, a path taken with greater liberty and greater boldness tending towards experiment and contrariety. To know this sculpture is to help us in our understanding of the various shades and facets of this overflowing and many-sided genius in his constant state of discovery and alertness, and finally we are helped to contemplate the supreme and majestic unity with which is linked such loveliness, complexity, and passion.



Plate 1 Head of a child, Pierre Matisse (No.10)



Plate 2 Standing Nude (No.20)



Plate 3 **Madeleine**, 2nd state (No.5)

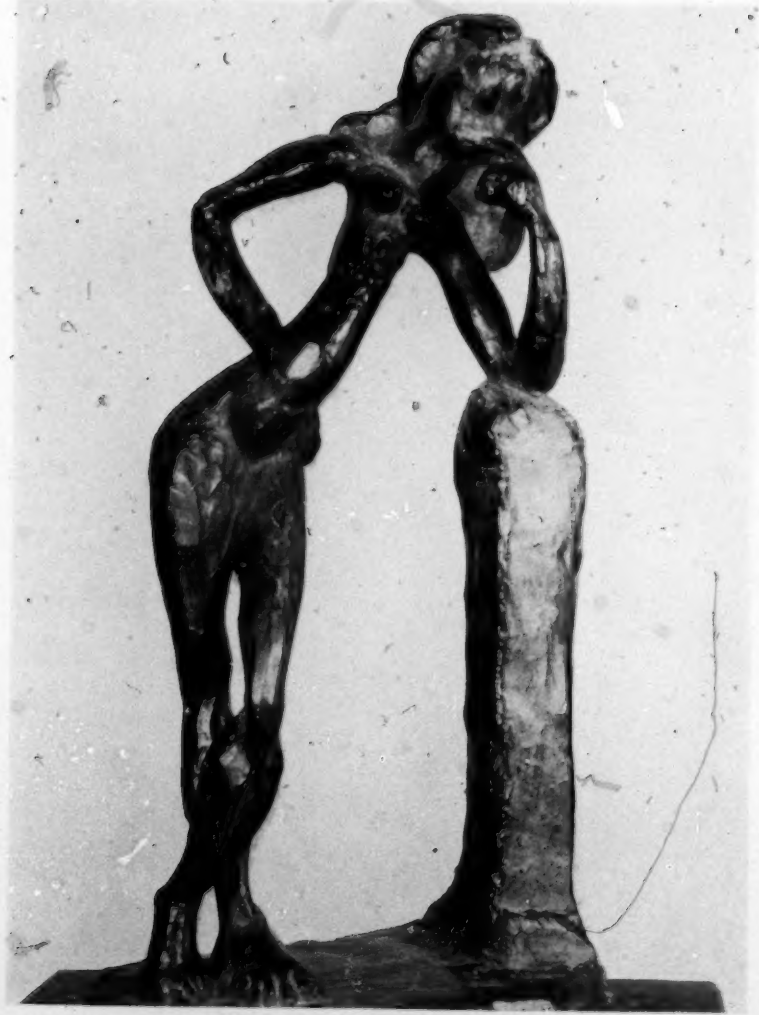


Plate 4 La Serpentine (No.33)



Plate 5 Two Negresses (No.32)



Plate 6 **The Dream**, 1st stage (No.55)



Plate 7 The Dream, 4th stage (No.55)



Plate 8 Head of a Little Girl with necklace (No.26)

Sculpture

- 1 **Tiger**, 1899-1901: height $8\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 2 **Study of a Foot**, 1900: height $11\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 3 **Horse**, 1901: height $6\frac{3}{8}$ in. (2/10)
- 4 **Madeleine**, 1st state, 1901: height $23\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 5 **Madeleine**, 2nd state, 1903: height $23\frac{1}{4}$ in. (Plate 3)
- 6 **Head of a Child**, 1903: bas-relief, height $4\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 7 **The Slave**, 1900-1903: height $36\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 8 **Seated Nude, Arm Behind the Back**, 1904: height $11\frac{7}{8}$ in.
- 9 **Seated Nude, Arms on the Head**, 1904: height $13\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 10 **Head of a Child, Pierre Matisse**, 1905: height $6\frac{3}{8}$ in. (Plate 1)
- 11 **Nude leaning on the Hands**, 1905: height 5 in.
- 12 **Reclining Nude in Chemise**, 1905: height $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.
- 13 **Reclining Nude**, 1st state, 1907: height $13\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 14 **Reclining Nude**, 2nd state, 1929?: height $7\frac{7}{8}$ in.
- 15 **Reclining Nude**, 3rd state, 1929?: height $11\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 16 **Head of a Child**, 1905: height $5\frac{1}{8}$ in.
- 17 **Head of a Little Girl, Marguerite**, 1906: height $6\frac{5}{8}$ in.
- 18 **Small Head with Chignon**, 1906: height $5\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 19 **Small Head with Straight Hair**: height $3\frac{1}{8}$ in.
- 20 **Standing Nude**, 1906: height 19 in. (6/10) (Plate 2)
- 21 **The Dance**, 1906: height $16\frac{1}{8}$ in.
- 22 **Standing Nude, Arms Raised**, 1906: height $10\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 23 **Torso with Head**, 1906: height $8\frac{3}{8}$ in. (8/10)
- 24 **Figure Drawing a Thorn**, 1906?: height $7\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 25 **Decorative Figure**, 1906: height $28\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 26 **Head of a Little Girl with Necklace**, 1907: height $5\frac{7}{8}$ in. (Plate 0)
- 27 **Large Crouching Nude**, 1907: height $16\frac{1}{8}$ in.
- 28 **Crouching Nude, Right Hand on the Ground**, 1908: height $7\frac{1}{4}$ in. (8/10)
- 29 **Small Crouching Nude with Arms**, 1908: height $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.
- 30 **Small Crouching Nude without Arm**, 1908: height $5\frac{1}{8}$ in.
- 31 **Small Crouching Torso without Arms or Head**, 1908: height $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. (6/10)
- 32 **Two Negresses**, 1909: height $18\frac{1}{4}$ in. (7/10) (Plate 5)
- 33 **La Serpentine**, 1909: height $22\frac{1}{4}$ in. (Plate 4)

- 34 Torso without Arms or Head, 1909: height $9\frac{1}{2}$ in.
- 35 Head of Jeannette, 1st state, 1910: height 12 in.
- 36 Head of Jeannette, 2nd state, 1910: height $10\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- 37 Head of Jeannette, 3rd state, 1910-11: height $24\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 38 Head of Jeannette, 4th state, 1910-11: height 24 in.
- 39 Head of Marguerite, 1915: height $12\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 40 Crouching Nude, 1918: height $9\frac{7}{8}$ in.
- 41 Nude with Bolster, 1918: height $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. (9/10)
- 42 Venus, 1919?: height $10\frac{5}{8}$ in. (10/10)
- 43 Large Seated Nude, 1925: height $31\frac{1}{2}$ in.
- 44 Large Head, 1927: height $12\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 45 Large Head, 1929: height $15\frac{3}{8}$ in.
- 46 Venus in a Shell, 1930: height 13 in.
- 47 The Tiara, 1930?: height $8\frac{1}{2}$ in.
- 48 Standing Nude: bas-relief: height 9 in.

All works of sculpture are in bronze. The two figures given after the height indicate the number of the cast and the number of the edition.

Paintings

- 50 **Still Life with Shell Fish**, 1940: $21\frac{1}{4}$ by $31\frac{7}{8}$ in.
51 Eleven studies for No.50
52 Two photographs showing successive stages of the painting of No.50

53 **The Dream**, 1940: $31\frac{7}{8}$ by $25\frac{3}{8}$ in.
54 Seven studies for No.53
55 Thirteen photographs showing successive stages of the painting of No.53
(Plates 6 and 7)

56 **Still Life with Magnolia**, 1941: $28\frac{3}{4}$ by $39\frac{3}{4}$ in.
57 Sixty-eight studies for No.56
58 Five photographs showing successive stages of the painting of No.56

Drawings

Variations on a Vase and Bunch of Ivy in Flower, 1942

- 59 Three drawings: *pen and ink*, $25\frac{3}{8}$ by $19\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Theme and Variations: Head of a Girl, 1944

- 60 Study for illustration to *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire:
charcoal, $17\frac{7}{8}$ by $13\frac{3}{4}$ in.
61 Twenty drawings: *pencil*, 16 by $20\frac{3}{4}$ in.

Theme and Variations: Standing Nude, 1951

- 62 Standing Nude with Arms Raised: *charcoal and gouache*, $20\frac{1}{2}$ by $14\frac{3}{8}$ in.
63 Standing Nude with Arms Crossed: *charcoal*, $20\frac{1}{2}$ by $14\frac{3}{8}$ in.
64 Ten drawings: *conté*, $25\frac{3}{8}$ by $19\frac{1}{8}$ in.

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